

INDIANAPOLIS MAYOR'S OFFICE FOURTH YEAR CHARTER REVIEW

21ST CENTURY CHARTER SCHOOL AT FALL CREEK

October 4, 2006

The Indianapolis Mayor's Office Fourth Year Charter Review (FYCR) is designed to assess the extent to which a school is meeting the standards for renewal at the mid-point of its charter term. The FYCR Protocol is based on the *Performance Framework*, which is used to determine a school's success relative to a common set of indicators, as well as to school-based goals.

Consistent with the Indianapolis Mayor's Office Performance Framework, the following four core questions and sub-questions are examined to determine a school's success:

1. Is the educational program a success?

- 1.1. Is the school making adequate yearly academic progress, as measured by the Indiana Department of Education's system of accountability?
- 1.2. Are students making substantial and adequate gains over time, as measured using value-added analysis?
- 1.3. Is the school outperforming schools that the students would have been assigned to attend?
- 1.4. Is the school meeting its school-specific educational goals?

2. Is the organization effective and well-run?

- 2.1. Is the school in sound fiscal health?
- 2.2. Are the school's student enrollment, attendance, and retention rates strong?
- 2.3. Is the school's Board active and competent in its oversight?
- 2.4. Is there a high level of parent satisfaction with the school?
- 2.5. Is the school administration strong in its academic and organizational leadership?
- 2.6. Is the school meeting its school-specific organizational and management performance goals?

3. Is the school meeting its operations and access obligations?

- 3.1. Has the school satisfactorily completed all of its organizational structure and governance obligations?
- 3.2. Is the school's physical plant safe and conducive to learning?
- 3.3. Has the school established and implemented a fair and appropriate pupil enrollment process?
- 3.4. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?
- 3.5. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with limited English proficiency?

4. Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?

- 4.1. Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
- 4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?
- 4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?
- 4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
- 4.5. Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
- 4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
- 4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
- 4.8. Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?

COMPLETION OF THE FOURTH YEAR CHARTER REVIEW

As part of its oversight of charter schools, the Mayor's Office engaged SchoolWorks to conduct site visits of schools in their fourth year of operation. The purpose was to present the school and the Mayor's Office a professional judgment on conditions and practices at the school, which are best provided through an external perspective. The FYCR site visit used multiple sources of evidence to understand the school's performance. Evidence collection began before the visit with the review of key documents and continued on-site through additional document review, classroom visits and interviews with a number of stakeholders. Findings provided by the site visit team are used to celebrate what the school is doing well and prioritize its areas for improvement in preparation for renewal. It was the site visit team's task to report on the following pre-identified aspects of the *Performance Framework* and to assist the Mayor's Office in its completion of the FYCR Protocol: Core Question 4 and all of its sub-questions (4.1-4.8), sub-question 2.3 and sub-question 2.5. The Mayor's Office completed responses to Core Question 1 and all of its sub-questions (1.1-1.4), Core Question 3 and all of its sub-questions (3.1-3.5), and sub-questions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4.

The outcome of the FYCR provides the school with a written report that includes a judgment and supporting evidence on various aspects of the school, based on a rubric of indicators¹ developed for each of the four core questions and sub-questions in the *Performance Framework*. The assessment system utilizes the following judgments:

Does not meet standard
Approaching standard
Meets standard
Exceeds standard

Note: In the case of the sub-questions under Core Question 3 and Core Question 4 of the *Performance Framework*, there is no rating for *Exceeds standard*. *Meets standard* is the highest possible rating.

¹ Rubric indicators are subject to revision by the Mayor's Office.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

21ST CENTURY CHARTER SCHOOL AT FALL CREEK

Core Question 1: Is the educational program a success?	FINDING
1.1. Is the school making adequate yearly academic progress, as measured by the Indiana Department of Education's system of accountability?	Approaching Standard
1.2. Are students making substantial and adequate gains over time, as measured using value-added analysis?	Approaching Standard
1.3. Is the school outperforming schools that the students would have been assigned to attend?	Not Evaluated¹
1.4. Is the school meeting its school-specific educational goals?	Not Applicable²
Core Question 2: Is the organization effective and well-run?	FINDING
2.1. Is the school in sound fiscal health?	Meets Standard
2.2. Are the school's student enrollment, attendance, and retention rates strong?	Exceeds Standard
2.3. Is the school's board active and competent in its oversight?	Approaching Standard
2.4. Is there a high level of parent satisfaction with the school?	Meets Standard
2.5. Is the school administration strong in its academic and organizational leadership?	Approaching Standard
2.6. Is the school meeting its school-specific organizational and management performance goals?	Not Applicable³
Core Question 3: Is the school meeting its operations and access obligations?	FINDING
3.1. Has the school satisfactorily completed all of its organizational structure and governance obligations?	Meets Standard
3.2. Is the school's physical plant safe and conducive to learning?	Meets Standard
3.3. Has the school established and implemented a fair and appropriate pupil enrollment process?	Meets Standard
3.4. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?	Does Not Meet Standard
3.5. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with limited English proficiency?	Not Applicable⁴

¹ The school was not evaluated in comparison to schools students would have otherwise attended.

² The school did not have school-specific educational goals that were evaluated for the FYCR.

³ The school did not have school-specific organizational and management performance goals that were evaluated for the FYCR.

⁴ This question is not applicable to the school because it does not serve any English as a Second Language students.

Core Question 4: Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?	<i>FINDING</i>
4.1. Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?	Does Not Meet Standard
4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?	Does Not Meet Standard
4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?	Not Applicable¹
4.4. <i>Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?</i>	Approaching Standard
4.5. Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?	Does Not Meet Standard
4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?	Meets Standard
4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?	Meets Standard
4.8. Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?	Meets Standard

¹ The school only served students up to grade 9 in 2005-06. As a result, the principal is currently developing a plan for preparing students for post-secondary options. Since that plan is in the developmental stages only, the FYCR site visit team did not review the school in this area.

FINDINGS, INDICATORS AND EVIDENCE

21ST CENTURY CHARTER SCHOOL AT FALL CREEK

Core Question 1: Is the educational program a success?

1.1. Is the school making adequate yearly academic progress (AYP), as measured by the Indiana Department of Education's system of accountability?	
Does not meet standard	School has met AYP in less than half of student subgroups for the last two consecutive years.
Approaching standard	School has met AYP in more than half of student subgroups for one of the last two years.
Meets standard	School has met AYP across all student subgroups for the last two years.
Exceeds standard	School has exceeded the AYP target in all student subgroups in at least one of the last two years.

Approaching Standard. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004 toward statewide academic goals set by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). However, the school did not make AYP in 2005 toward the Mathematics target in both student subgroups for which it was evaluated.

IDOE determined that 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek made AYP in fall 2004 on all seven indicators it evaluated: school-wide attendance; school-wide passing rates on the English and Mathematics ISTEP+ exams; ISTEP+ English and Mathematics passing rates for African-American students; and school-wide and African-American ISTEP+ participation rates.

21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek made AYP in English school-wide in fall 2005, as did the two subgroups evaluated: African-American students and students who qualified for free or reduced price lunch. The school achieved AYP in Mathematics school-wide, but the two subgroups did not. The school exceeded the state target for attendance school-wide, as well as targets for ISTEP+ participation rates school-wide and in the African-American subgroup. Due to the small number of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch, the school was not evaluated on the participation rate for this subgroup.

By achieving AYP overall in 2004, and making AYP in seven out of nine indicators in 2005, the school is approaching the IDOE's standard for achieving AYP.

1.2. Are students making substantial and adequate gains over time, as measured using value-added analysis?	
Does not meet standard	Value-added analysis indicates that less than 50% of tested students made sufficient gains.
Approaching standard	Value-added analysis indicates that 50%-74% of tested students made sufficient gains.
Meets standard	Value-added analysis indicates that more than 75%-89% of tested students made sufficient gains.
Exceeds standard	Value-added analysis indicates that at least 90% of tested students made sufficient gains.

Approaching Standard. Analysis of data on fall-to-spring gains over three years revealed that an average of 67% of students achieved sufficient gains to reach proficiency over time. This percentage is approaching the Mayor's standard of at least 75% of students making sufficient gains.

Analysts determined whether each student in the charter school achieved sufficient gains on the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test to become proficient over time, typically over two years. For each student, analysts projected the student's test scores into the future based on the amount of progress that student made on the test between fall and spring. Analysts then compared that projected score to the score needed to be pass Indiana's ISTEP+ exam at that future time. Finally, analysts calculated the average percentage across all grades (second through eighth where applicable), subjects (reading, math, and language) and years (2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06). The result was a single percentage, which determines the rating for the school according to the rubric above.

The methodology for determining sufficient gains changed between 2003-04 and subsequent years. In 2003-04, analysts determined whether students made sufficient gains to become proficient by the eighth grade. In subsequent years (2004-05 and 2005-06), the Mayor's Office asked analysts to apply a more stringent standard, determining whether students made sufficient gains to become proficient within two years at most (e.g., analysts determined whether a third grade student made sufficient gains to become proficient by the end of fifth grade). Because the 2003-04 method allowed students more time to become proficient, the percentage of students achieving sufficient gains was generally higher in 2003-04, and a drop in this percentage in subsequent years does not necessarily indicate a decrease in school performance. A more detailed explanation of the methodology for calculating sufficient gains appears in Supplemental Report #3 of the 2006 Accountability Report on Mayor-Sponsored Schools.

In summary, the school's three year average of 67% places the school in the Approaching Standard category in the Mayor's Performance Framework.

Year	Average Sufficient Gain
2003-2004	76.7%
2004-2005	67.6%
2005-2006	56.3%
Multi-Year Average	67%

1.3. Is the school outperforming schools that the students would have been assigned to attend?	
Does not meet standard	School's overall performance in terms of proficiency and/or growth is generally lower than that of the schools the students would otherwise have been assigned to attend in each of the last three years.
Approaching standard	School's overall performance in terms of both proficiency and/or growth is generally lower than that of the schools the students would otherwise have been assigned to attend in two of the last three years.
Meets standard	School's overall performance in terms of both proficiency and/or growth is generally as good as that of the schools the students would otherwise have been assigned to attend.
Exceeds standard	School's performance consistently outpaces that of the schools the students would otherwise have been assigned to attend.

Not Evaluated.

1.4. Is the school meeting its school-specific educational goals?	
Does not meet standard	School has clearly not met its school-specific educational goal.
Approaching standard	School is making good progress toward meeting its school-specific educational goal.
Meets standard	School has clearly met its school-specific educational goal.
Exceeds standard	School has clearly exceeded its school-specific educational goal.

Not applicable. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek did not have school-specific educational goals that were evaluated for the FYCR.

Core Question 2: Is the organization effective and well-run?

2.1. Is the school in sound fiscal health?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents concerns in <u>three or more</u> of the following areas: a) its state financial audits (e.g., presence of "significant findings"); b) its financial staffing and systems; c) its success in achieving a balanced budget over the past three years; d) the adequacy of its projections of revenues and expenses for the next three years; e) its fulfillment of financial reporting requirements under Sections 10 and 17 of the charter agreement.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one or two</u> of the following areas: a) its state financial audits (e.g., presence of "significant findings"); b) its financial staffing and systems; c) its success in achieving a balanced budget over the past three years; d) the adequacy of its projections of revenues and expenses for the next three years; e) its fulfillment of financial reporting requirements under Sections 10 and 17 of the charter agreement.
Meets standard	The school presents significant concerns in no more than <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) its state financial audits (e.g., presence of "significant findings"); b) its financial staffing and systems; c) its success in achieving a balanced budget over the past three years; d) the adequacy of its projections of revenues and expenses for the next three years; e) its fulfillment of financial reporting requirements under Sections 10 and 17 of the charter agreement. In addition, if the school presents significant concerns in one area, it has a credible plan for addressing the concern that has been approved by the Mayor's Office.
Exceeds standard	The school demonstrates satisfactory performance in all of the areas listed in previous levels.

Meets Standard. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has demonstrated strong fiscal health over the first four years of its charter term. The school's audits by the Indiana State Board of Accounts (ISBA) have not presented any significant findings. The school has been audited by the ISBA twice in the first four years of operation – for the periods from July 2002 to June 2003 and from July 2003 to June 2005. Each report included an unqualified opinion from the ISBA for the school's financials. Both audit reports outlined several findings related to the school's financial management and accounting systems, none of which were deemed significant. Following each audit, the school demonstrated a willingness to address the findings and improve its financial management systems.

21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has established adequate staffing and systems for managing the school's finances. For the first three and a half years of operation, the school contracted with an outside bookkeeper to establish its accounting system and assist with the school's financial management responsibilities. The school identified a staff person who communicated and met regularly with the outside bookkeeper regarding the school's finances. During that time, the school's finances were managed satisfactorily. In spring 2006, the school added a Certified Public Accountant to its staff to oversee the school's accounting and finances and ended its contract with the outside bookkeeper. The school has experienced a period of transition since the change in staffing which has resulted in one late report to the IDOE and a delay in submitting quarterly financial information to the Mayor's Office. However, the school has demonstrated a commitment to fulfill its financial reporting obligations and to improve its timeliness in meeting financial reporting deadlines.

21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek uses two separate systems for budgeting and accounting for actual revenues and expenses. As a result, it has been difficult over the last four years to effectively evaluate the school's success at achieving a balanced budget. The line items on the budget for revenues and expenses do not correspond exactly to the chart of accounts used in the school's accounting system and prescribed by the ISBA. Therefore, any evaluation of the school's budget to actual revenue and expenses is based on estimates rather than an actual report that can be generated from the school's

accounting software. This is a clear area for attention for the school. In the 2006-07 school year, the school must ensure that the budget line items for revenues and expenses correspond exactly to the revenue and expense categories in the school's accounting system as prescribed by the ISBA. These changes would allow for a more detailed analysis of the school's success at achieving a balanced budget.

21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has created a budget for the next five years of operation. While the budget includes what appear to be realistic revenue and expense projections based on the first four years of operation, the school needs to revise the five-year budget to correspond with the revenue and expense category used in the ISBA chart of accounts. These changes would provide more accurate comparisons between the actual revenues and expenses in the first four years of operation and the revenues and expenses budgeted for the next five years.

Over the past four years, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has fulfilled its financial reporting requirements included in the charter. As mentioned above, the school has experienced a period of transition since hiring a Certified Public Accountant on staff to manage the school's finances. Since March 2006, the school has submitted its Form 9 Biannual Financial Report to the IDOE late and has not timely submitted quarterly financial information to the accounting firm the Mayor's Office engaged to review each school's finances. However, the school has demonstrated a commitment to fulfill its financial reporting obligations and to improve its timeliness in meeting financial reporting deadlines.

By maintaining current levels of financial compliance, and by ensuring that budgets and revenue and expense reports utilize identical categories for accurate comparisons in the future, the school will continue to experience strong fiscal health, and will improve its financial outlook and forecasts for the future.

2.2. Are the school's student enrollment, attendance, and retention rates strong?	
Does not meet standard	The school's actual enrollment consistently falls short of target enrollment by <u>10% or more</u> . Student attendance and retention rates are consistently below the school's agreed-upon target rates.
Approaching standard	The school's actual enrollment consistently falls short of target enrollment by <u>1-9%</u> . Student attendance and retention rates are consistently below the school's agreed-upon target rates.
Meets standard	The school is consistently fully enrolled. Student attendance and retention rates are generally at or above the school's agreed-upon target rates.
Exceeds standard	The school is consistently fully enrolled. Student attendance and retention rates consistently exceed the school's agreed-upon target rates.

Exceeds Standard. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek was consistently fully enrolled during the last two years, exceeded the state's goal for attendance each of the last three years, and has succeeded in retaining many of its students.

Each year, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has maintained enrollment within one student of its target enrollment. The school's annual target enrollments are agreed to in the charter. The following table displays the target enrollment compared with the school's official fall enrollment reported to the IDOE. In fall 2003 and fall 2004, official enrollment at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek matched its target enrollment, and differed by only one student in fall 2005

School Year	Target Enrollment	Fall Enrollment	Percent Below
2003-04	160	160	0.0%
2004-05	186	186	0.0%
2005-06	300	299	0.3%

Source: Fall enrollment reports filed with the IDOE.
Targets are from the school's charter.

Attendance rates at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek consistently exceeded the IDOE's target of 95% over the last three years for which data is available. Each year, the average daily attendance at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek exceeded 96%.

School Year	Attendance Rate
2002-03	96.5%
2003-04	96.1%
2004-05	96.3%

Source: IDOE.

No targets have been established for student retention rates for 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek. Each year, fall to fall retention rates have improved at the school. Of the 125 students who enrolled at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek in fall 2002 when the school first began operating, 83 (66.4%) returned to the school in fall 2003. Fall to fall retention rates improved the following two years, to 80.6% between fall 2004 and fall 2005.

Years	Students Enrolled Initial Year	Students Re-enrolled Following Year	Retention Rate
Fall 2002 to Fall 2003	125	83	66.4%
Fall 2003 to Fall 2004	160	121	75.6%
Fall 2004 to Fall 2005	186	150	80.6%

Source: Mayor's Office analysis of official fall enrollment reports filed with the IDOE. Because the official report was not available for fall 2002 and 2003, the school provided electronic versions instead.

In summary, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek exceeded the Mayor's standard by consistently reaching its enrollment targets, exceeding the state's target for attendance, and improving its retention rate each year. The school has shown consistently strong enrollment, attendance, and student retention.

2.3. Is the school's board active and competent in its oversight?	
Does not meet standard	The school appears to lack clear, consistent, and competent stewardship. The Board lacks the number of members specified in the by-laws; it is not well-balanced in member expertise; there has been consistently high turnover on the Board unrelated to the term limits stipulated in the Board's by-laws; roles and responsibilities of the Board are not clear; it often fails to achieve a quorum.
Approaching standard	Board membership is not complete; there has been some unanticipated turnover on the Board unrelated to the term limits stipulated in the Board's by-laws; it is reasonably well-balanced in member expertise; roles and responsibilities on the Board are reasonably clear; it is difficult to get a quorum; Board subcommittees are somewhat active; the Board is developing its ability to provide clear, consistent, and competent stewardship.
Meets standard	The Board's membership collectively contributes a broad skill set and fair representation of the community; Board members are knowledgeable about the school; roles and responsibilities of the Board are clearly delineated; Board meetings reflect thoughtful discussion and progress in the consideration of issues; overall, the Board provides consistent and competent stewardship of the school.
Exceeds standard	The Board meets the standard for this sub-question AND: displays exceptional expertise and stewardship, as evidenced by significant Board actions to enhance the school over time.

Approaching Standard. The Board is very experienced and appears to provide competent oversight for financial and operational matters. However, the Board is not fully meeting the school's need for stewardship in monitoring strategic direction and attainment of the academic mission is not fully meeting the needs of the school. There has also been a decline in Board membership from 12 to 7 since its inception in September of 2001, although the current membership meets the requirements in the school's bylaws. Eight of the founding members are no longer serving and two other members who joined the Board after its inception have also left. Of the remaining founding members, the current Chair, Vice-Chair and the Board Treasurer continue to play significant roles on the Board. Although there has been some turnover in the Board's membership, there has been stability in the Board's direction because three of the key leadership positions have been filled by founding members.

The seven current members have significant business experience and expertise. The members include the former Chief Executive Officer of a major company, the former Chief Financial Officer of another corporation, the vice president of a local university and an attorney. Interviews with three of the seven Board members confirmed that they had reasonable knowledge and familiarity with the operational aspects of the school, particularly regarding financial matters. All were firmly committed to the school's mission.

There is a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the school's Board and administration. The Chairman of the Board, the CEO of the school and the school principal all reported independently during interviews that the Board's primary role was to set the budget and establish policies. All three also indicated that, when requested, the Board members provide feedback to the school leaders. The Board Chair stated that he was not a micromanager and that the CEO had been given the authority and responsibility to run the school according to the policies the Board had established. The CEO and the principal agreed with this description of roles and responsibilities. The CEO indicated that he appreciated the Board's commitment to not micromanage the school, but that he would be receptive to the Board taking a more active role in serving as ambassadors for the school and in helping the school raise additional funds.

A review of minutes of Board Meetings indicates that a quorum was present at all meetings and that discussion of issues related to the school's operation took place at those meetings. Agenda items at the various Board meetings included: Board by-laws, budget reports, Board resignations and appointments, contracts, leases and management agreements. A review of the minutes also indicates that at each Board meeting, the CEO and school principal presented a school report that highlighted student activities, academic progress and various operational aspects of the school.

The Greater Educational Opportunities (GEO) Foundation has a contract with the school to provide it with a wide range of services. An area of concern is how the school can hold the GEO Foundation accountable for services, given that both entities have the same Chair and Vice-Chair. The GEO Foundation also appoints the school's Board, and the school's CEO is a GEO Foundation employee. It is not clear how the appropriate level of oversight of the GEO Foundation's services can be achieved in this relationship. Although the GEO Foundation's contract for services lists the services to be provided to the school, there are no clearly articulated performance targets either in the contract or elsewhere that would clarify what constitutes acceptable performance by the GEO Foundation to the school.

There was limited evidence in Board minutes or in discussions with the Chairman of the Board and the CEO of any strategic planning processes at the Board level. Board members participated in a one-day strategic planning retreat over a year ago, but both Board members and the CEO reported that no further planning activity had taken place after that meeting. There appears to be a need for strategic planning at this juncture because there is a widespread perception among administration and teachers that the school's current program is not working for a large percentage of students, and there is no widely understood plan to address this issue.

In summary, the current Board has established an appropriate set of roles and responsibilities that do not lead to micromanagement for the school. The Board is highly qualified and has shown its dedication to the school through its efforts to date, particularly in oversight of financial matters and support during the school's start-up years. Currently, the lack of clear accountability for the school's service provider and the absence of a comprehensive strategic planning process involving the Board and all of the school's stakeholders are areas for improvement in governance. This can be addressed by instituting a rigorous needs-based strategic planning process that involves representatives of all of the school's stakeholders.

2.4. Is there a high level of parent satisfaction with the school?	
Does not meet standard	Less than 70% of parents surveyed indicate that they are satisfied overall with the school.
Approaching standard	More than 70% but less than 80% of parents surveyed indicate that they are satisfied overall with the school.
Meets standard	More than 80% but less than 90% of parents surveyed indicate that they are satisfied overall with the school.
Exceeds standard	At least 90% of parents surveyed indicate that they are satisfied overall with the school.

Meets Standard. Averaged across the last two years, 86% of parents surveyed indicated that they are satisfied overall with 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek. In spring 2004, the Center of Excellence in Leadership in Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis administered an anonymous survey to all students' parents and guardians. Of the parent surveys received, 84% indicated overall satisfaction with the school. That percentage rose to 87% in spring 2005.

2.5. Is the school administration strong in its academic and organizational leadership?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address them: a) the leadership has insufficient academic and/or business expertise; b) turnover in leadership has been high and/or damaging to the school; c) roles and responsibilities among leaders and between leaders and the Board are generally unclear; d) the school's leadership does not appear to actively engage in a process of continuous improvement; it has made few mid-course corrections in response to problems.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address it: a) the leadership has insufficient academic and/or business expertise; b) turnover in leadership has been high and/or damaging to the school; c) roles and responsibilities among leaders and between leaders and the Board are generally unclear; d) the school's leadership does not appear to actively engage in a process of continuous improvement; it has made few mid-course corrections in response to problems.
Meets standard	The school's leadership a) has sufficient academic and/or business expertise; b) has been sufficiently stable over time; c) has clearly defined roles and responsibilities among leaders and between leaders and the Board; d) actively engages in a process of continuous improvement which has led to some mid-course corrections.
Exceeds standard	The leadership displays exceptional academic and business expertise. Leadership turnover has been manageable and appropriate. Roles and responsibilities among leaders and between leaders and the Board are clear. The leadership has established exemplary processes to engage in continuous improvement which have led to significant enhancements to the school over time.

Approaching Standard. Because 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek presents significant concerns in one of the four areas considered, the FYCR site visit team rated the school as approaching standard for academic and organizational leadership. The school's CEO and principal have been with the school since its inception and their leadership, commitment, dedication and expertise played a very significant role in its early success. The Chief Academic Officer of the school, who was also a part of the original leadership team, left in January 2005 and has only recently been retained as a consultant. Although there are very clear roles and responsibilities among leaders, and between leaders and the Board as they pertain to this individual school, the recent rapid expansion in the number of schools – from one to four – managed by the GEO Foundation has greatly increased the responsibilities and workload of the school's leadership team. Although the school's leadership has made numerous mid-course corrections in response to problems, it does not appear to have actively engaged in a well structured process of continuous improvement.

The leadership team (CEO and principal) is very solidly committed to the school's mission. The team's hard work and dedication have earned it the respect of the Board, the staff, parents and students. During an interview with the CEO, he expressed concern that the school did not meet AYP in 2005-06, and vowed to "get it right." The principal indicated that the school is in transition and that the model they have been following may not work for as many as 40% of students. He stated that the results they have reviewed indicate a need for changes, refinements and supplemental programs. A vast majority of the teachers interviewed also indicated concerns that the program may not meet all students' needs. The principal stated that passing ISTEP+ is a minimum goal only, and that his expectations for student achievement exceeded that minimum.

The CEO indicated that his responsibilities at the school focus his attentions on the school's budget and fundraising. He also indicated that he would intervene and attempt to influence the school's overall

operations to ensure they are meeting the mission according to the charter. Both the principal and CEO agreed that the principal is responsible for firing and hiring the staff and leading daily operations. The CEO evaluates the principal based on the principal's job description. Since they both work in the same small building, the "evaluation is ongoing" according to the CEO. At the present time, there are no clearly-defined goals or targets in the principal's evaluation plans, although the principal indicated that clearly-defined goals might be helpful to him.

The school's leaders have made numerous mid-course corrections in response to problems that have naturally arisen over the course of the charter, but they do not appear to have actively engaged in a well-structured process of continuous improvement. During the FYCR site visit team's three-day visit, the principal cited numerous ad hoc adjustments and planned changes to the school's program in reaction to challenges that had been identified. Recent changes include: adjustments to the school's advisory times, the introduction of the Plato Learning System, the decision to reinstitute the annual TerraNova assessments and numerous individual teacher's modifications of instruction based upon the results of the latest ISTEP+ assessment. Changes planned for next year include: the addition of a Dean of Students position, the provision of time for teacher collaboration and professional development during the school day, a greater focus during faculty meetings on what is working and what is not working in the school program, adjustments to the A+ program to better align the program with the Indiana state academic standards, an improved student data system, a more systematic and regular teacher evaluation process, continued incremental changes to the instructional model by increasing the amount of small group work and the implementation of the high school plan.

All of the above examples were the result of individuals or small groups engaged in ad hoc planning to respond to current issues. While some – or even all – of these initiatives may prove beneficial, none are clearly tied together by a larger plan. Many are not written, and none stems from a comprehensive needs assessment. Knowledge of these plans among staff is very limited.

The FYCR site visit team found little evidence of strategic, systematic planning. There is no overarching written school plan that is based on broad input from all stakeholders and a comprehensive review of all available data. Teachers report first learning of many new initiatives only through the mention of them by the principal. Teachers have recently initiated a planning process through Saturday meetings. Several teachers reported that these grew out of their frustration with their level of involvement in school-wide planning efforts. At the same time, the CEO, principal and the academic consultant who recently returned are drafting a plan for improvements. These efforts are not currently coordinated.

In summary, the expertise, commitment and dedication of the school's leadership team have played an important role in the school's early success. The changing mission and the growth of the school, as well as the expansion of the GEO Foundation's role in the charter school movement, have also changed the responsibilities and scope of work of the school's leadership team. Processes that served the school well when it was smaller and a single entity under the GEO Foundation may not work as well in the new configuration. Although the school has made numerous mid-course ad hoc corrections, it suffers from the lack of a needs-based, well-structured process of continuous improvement. To address this area of weakness, the school should research, adopt and implement a planning process that begins with a broad-based needs assessment, in collaboration with the Board, and including input from all stakeholders. This should result prioritized action plans with clear timelines and measurements to monitor success.

2.6. Is the school meeting its school-specific organizational and management performance goals?	
Does not meet standard	School has clearly not met its school-specific organizational goal.
Approaching standard	School is making good progress toward meeting its school-specific organizational goal.
Meets standard	School has clearly met its school-specific organizational goal.
Exceeds standard	School has clearly exceeded its school-specific organizational goal.

Not applicable. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek did not have school-specific organizational and management performance goals that were evaluated for the FYCR.

Core Question 3: Is the school meeting its operations and access obligations?

3.1. Has the school satisfactorily completed all of its organizational and governance obligations?	
Does not meet standard	School presents significant concerns in two or more of its organizational and governance obligations as specified in the Compliance and Governance Handbook, with no evidence of a credible plan to address them: a) maintenance of adequate "compliance and governance binder" containing all required documents; b) completion of criminal background checks on all Board members; c) transparency of meetings and decision-making in accordance with open meetings obligations; d) maintenance of adequate Board minutes.
Approaching standard	School presents significant concerns in one of its organizational and governance obligations as specified in the Compliance and Governance Handbook, with no evidence of a credible plan to address it: a) maintenance of adequate "compliance and governance binder" containing all required documents; b) completion of criminal background checks on all Board members; c) transparency of meetings and decision-making in accordance with open meetings obligations; d) maintenance of adequate Board minutes
Meets standard	School has substantially completed all of its organizational and governance obligations as specified in the Compliance and Governance Handbook, including: a) maintenance of adequate "compliance and governance binder" containing all required documents; b) completion of criminal background checks on all Board members; c) transparency of meetings and decision-making in accordance with open meetings obligations; d) maintenance of adequate Board minutes. Any concerns are minor and the school presents a credible plan to address them.

Meets Standard. With only a few exceptions, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek adequately maintains its compliance binder. The school also documents in a timely manner that background checks are conducted for all board members, and complies with public access and open door meeting laws by posting notices of board meetings. The board should, however, develop a schedule in advance for the year to ensure that all interested parties can properly plan to attend. Minutes are properly kept and provide adequate detail as to board actions and discussions.

3.2. Is the school's physical plant safe and conducive to learning?	
Does not meet standard	The facility requires <u>much</u> improvement in order to provide a safe environment that is conducive to learning. Significant health and safety code requirements have not been met AND/OR the school <u>lacks</u> many conditions such as the following: a design well-suited to meet the curricular and social needs of its students, faculty, and community members; a size appropriate for the enrollment and student-teacher ratios in each class; adequate maintenance and security; well-maintained equipment and furniture that match the educational needs of the students; and accessibility to all students.
Approaching standard	Significant health and safety code requirements are being met, but the facility needs <u>some</u> improvement in order to provide a safe environment that is conducive to learning. It <u>partially</u> – but not fully – provides conditions such as the following: a design well-suited to meet the curricular and social needs of its students, faculty, and community members; a size appropriate for the enrollment and student-teacher ratios in each class; good maintenance and security; well-maintained equipment and furniture that match the educational needs of the students; and accessibility to all students.
Meets standard	Significant health and safety code requirements are being met AND the facility generally provides a safe environment that is conducive to learning, based on conditions such as: a design well-suited to meet the curricular and social needs of its students, faculty, and community members; a size appropriate for the enrollment and student-teacher ratios in each class; good maintenance and security; well-maintained equipment and furniture that match the educational needs of the students; and accessibility to all students.

Meets Standard. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek's facility meets all health and safety code requirements, and provides a safe environment conducive to learning. The facility's design, size, maintenance, security, equipment and furniture are all adequate to meet the school's needs.

3.3. Has the school established and implemented a fair and appropriate pupil enrollment process?	
Does not meet standard	The school's enrollment process does not comply with applicable law AND/OR the school exhibits one or both of the following deficiencies a) a substantial number of documented parent complaints suggest that it is not being implemented fairly or appropriately; b) the school has not engaged in outreach to students throughout the community.
Approaching standard	The school's enrollment process complies with applicable law but exhibits one or both the following deficiencies: a) a substantial number of documented parent complaints suggest that it is not being implemented fairly or appropriately; b) the school has not engaged in outreach to students throughout the community.
Meets standard	The school's enrollment process complies with applicable law; there are minimal documented parent complaints suggesting that it is not being implemented fairly or appropriately; AND the school has engaged in outreach to students throughout the community.

Meets Standard. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek's admissions and enrollment practices and procedures meet the requirements of Indiana's charter school law. The Mayor's Office has received no complaints from parents regarding the school's enrollment practices, and the school conducts extensive outreach to parents citywide.

The Mayor's Office annually receives copies of 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek's enrollment policies and marketing plans. In spring 2006, a researcher at CELL interviewed the school's CEO about the school's enrollment and lottery practices and attended the school's admissions lottery. The policies

and CELL's observations show that 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek conducts a fair and appropriate enrollment process. The school extensively advertises openings through mass mailings of post cards to residents and schools, the school's website, open house signs on the school's property, and on billboards.

Each year, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has held an admissions lottery as the number of applications received exceeded the number of open seats at the school. All applicants were invited to the lotteries, which were open to the public and were conducted by a volunteer accountant or lawyer.

3.4. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to special-needs students?	
Does not meet standard	The school is <u>not</u> fulfilling its legal obligations regarding proper maintenance of special-needs students' files, and requires substantial improvement in order to achieve compliance such as the following: individualized education plans are up-to-date, student evaluations or re-evaluations have occurred within the appropriate timeframe, files contain the relevant required information, such as, file log sheet, parent consent form, documentation of case conference notification to parents and other conference participants and signatures of attendees at case conferences. A school does not meet the standard if any individual education plans have not been updated within the appropriate timeframe.
Approaching standard	The school is <u>not yet completely</u> fulfilling all of its legal obligations proper maintenance of special-needs students' files, and requires <i>some</i> (but not considerable) improvement to fully achieve conditions such as the following: individualized education plans are up-to-date, student evaluations or re-evaluations have occurred within the appropriate timeframe, files contain the relevant required information, such as, file log sheet, parent consent form, documentation of case conference notification to parents and other conference participants and signatures of attendees at case conferences.
Meets standard	The school is fulfilling its legal obligations regarding special-needs students, as indicated by conditions such as the following: individualized education plans are up-to-date, student evaluations or re-evaluations have occurred within the appropriate timeframe, files contain the relevant required information, such as, file log sheet, parent consent form, documentation of case conference notification to parents and other conference participants and signatures of attendees at case conferences.

Does Not Meet Standard. In order to evaluate this question, an outside team of experts trained by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) conducted a **file review** in September 2006 of the school's special education files. The team's focus was to determine whether the files contained all required components. For example, the team determined if the files contained required documents (e.g. log sheet, parent consent form), documentation of case conference notification to parents and other conference participants, signatures of attendees at case conferences, and the up-to-date Individualized Education Plan (IEP), as well as whether the IEP included all necessary information, such as, measurable annual goals, a statement of how the parent will be informed of the student's progress and the due date of the student's re-evaluation.

The team did not interview parents or evaluate the school's provision of special education services beyond the information included in the special education students' files.

Based on the review of the school's special education files, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek is not currently meeting the standards established for proper maintenance of files for special education students. During the file review, many IEPs were not current or were missing entirely. In a large number

of instances, the documentation for IEP case conferences was missing or contained incomplete information, indicating that they not been properly scheduled and/or the required attendees were not present. The school has not fully implemented the new online format for IEPs, called ICAN, and some of those IEPs that have been transferred to ICAN were only partially completed. The school reports that it is currently in the process of transferring the files to ICAN. In order to improve the special education files, the school should continue its efforts in 2006-07 to transfer all files to ICAN. Although schools are not required to transfer files to ICAN, when properly completed, the ICAN system would ensure that all IEPs are in compliance. The special education coordinator has not yet completed coursework to receive certification in multiple special education areas, but is enrolled.

Multiple problems with student special education files, including missing records, records that were only copies and not the original records, and outdated IEPs, indicate that the school does not have an effective system for implementing student IEPs and maintaining proper special education files. Because files were missing from the school and some files lacked original documents, the school cannot ensure student confidentiality. The school reports that the original copies of documents for the files were sent to the Virtual Special Education Cooperative at the Cooperative's request. Required signatures were missing in some files, and there were many instances in which important information had not been received from a school from which a student transferred. The school is required to provide written notice to a parent within a reasonable time in advance of any case conference that is scheduled, but in a large number of files, these notifications were incomplete or did not appear to have been sent to a parent within a reasonable time before the case conference. In several instances, the files indicated that the necessary representatives from the school did not attend.

The content of IEPs also needs improvement. Plans in some IEPs were not focused on the provision of services needed to support high school attainment or college participation, students with identified emotional disabilities did not have behavior support plans listed, and few accommodations were identified for the classroom and (particularly for mathematics). In two instances, a parent had requested a re-evaluation, but there was no information in the students' files regarding follow-up or a resolution.

The special education coordinator is currently enrolled in coursework to receive certification in multiple special education areas. It is not clear how the school ensures that there is adequate knowledge and implementation of accommodations for the wide range of student designations. Of the 52 students identified by the school as needing special education services, 12 receive services from a speech therapist. The remaining 40 students are listed as receiving services at the school, which is a large number of students for one special education coordinator to oversee. One of the school's principals is licensed in two exceptionality areas - mild disabilities and seriously emotionally handicapped. The extent of the principal's participation in the maintenance of the special education files is not clear.

In summary, 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek must implement an effective system for ensuring the security and confidentiality of all students' special education files. The school should immediately begin updating the files and getting files into compliance, as well as continuing its efforts to transfer files to the ICAN system properly. The school should evaluate whether one special education coordinator, particularly at the current level of expertise, is sufficient to satisfy the needs of the school's identified special education students.

3.5. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related To access and services to English as a Second Language (ESL) students?	
Does not meet standard	The school is <u>not</u> fulfilling its legal obligations regarding ESL students, and requires substantial improvement in order to achieve conditions such as the following: appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation, research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.
Approaching standard	The school is <u>not yet completely</u> fulfilling all of its legal obligations regarding ESL students, and requires <i>some</i> (but not considerable) improvement to fully achieve conditions such as the following: appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation, research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.
Meets standard	The school is fulfilling its legal obligations regarding ESL students, as indicated by conditions such as the following: appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation, research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.

Not Applicable. 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek does not have any English as a Second Language students enrolled, so this question is not applicable.

Core Question 4: Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?

4.1. Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum does not align with the state standards; b) the school does not conduct systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school does not regularly review scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas does not focus on core (prioritized) learning objectives; e) the staff lacks understanding and/or consensus as to how the curriculum documents and related program materials are used to effectively deliver instruction; f) there is a lack of programs and materials available to deliver the curriculum effectively.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum does not align with the state standards; b) the school does not conduct systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school does not regularly review scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas does not focus on core (prioritized) learning objectives; e) the staff lacks understanding and/or consensus as to how the curriculum documents and related program materials are used to effectively deliver instruction; f) there is a lack of programs and materials available to deliver the curriculum effectively.
Meets standard	The school: a) curriculum aligns with the state standards; b) conducts systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school regularly reviews scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) has a sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas that is prioritized and focuses on the core learning objectives; e) the staff understands and uniformly uses curriculum documents and related program materials to effectively deliver instruction; f) programs and materials are available to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Does Not Meet Standard. The foundation of 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek's curriculum is the computerized A+ curriculum, which the principal reports is aligned to Indiana state academic standards. It is possible, according to the principal, to view the direct alignment to state standards within A+ and adjust the program's emphasis on certain standards if a school should choose to do so. Because A+ provides a specific sequence of instruction directly tied to the standards embedded in the program, students are clearly receiving instruction on A+ that is in close alignment with at least a subset of Indiana state academic standards.

A brief review of Indiana state academic standards reveals that they include process standards such as writing, listening and speaking and problem solving. It is not clear how A+ addresses these standards, because the program generally requires students to provide short answers or select the correct answer. The project-based and small group aspects of the school's curriculum are intended to address some of these standards. Although the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas follows the A+ curriculum, it is not clear how the independent and project-based learning activities focus on core learning objectives.

Teachers reported determining what to teach during the independent and project-based activities in a variety of ways. Some teachers conducted their own assessments based on the Indiana state academic standards to determine the content of these sessions. Other teachers reported that they use the results of

the students' A+ mastery tests to determine the content of direct instruction. Still others indicated that they used ISTEP+ results of their students to determine the objectives for direct instruction. The absence of a school-wide process for aligning the curriculum that is outside of the A+ program creates a very real potential for gaps in the sequence of core learning objectives. It appears that the only reviews of the scope and sequence of the curriculum used at the school are those done by the teachers on an ad hoc and informal basis.

While the staff understands how the curriculum documents and related program materials are used to effectively deliver instruction within the A+ program, they also recognize that the program is not effective for all students. Some teachers described the program as not working well for students who are (1) not yet reading, (2) reading below grade level, or (3) having problems with reading comprehension. Other teachers note that A+ does not work well for students who do not have independent reading skills or have behavioral issues. The estimated proportion of students at the school for whom A+ does not work ranges between 20% and 40%, depending upon who considers the question. The faculty is exploring the use of other materials and alternative methods of instruction to meet the needs of those students whose needs are not currently being met. These efforts are not being brought together in a common planning process.

There are adequate programs and materials available to deliver the A+ curriculum effectively. Additional resources will be required to support the extension of the project-based learning initiative and other initiatives that may grow out of the current faculty study. These resources may include additional professional development opportunities, additional classroom support personnel and additional classroom instructional resources, such as workbooks and textbooks.

In summary, is it fair to assume that the portion of curriculum delivered through A+ is aligned with a subset of Indiana state academic standards. However, many important process standards may not be covered through A+. While teachers report referring to state standards, there is no clear process for ensuring that the portion of the curriculum delivered through small-group work and project-based learning is aligned with the standards. The school has not undertaken a review of the overall curriculum to identify gaps. To begin to address areas of weakness, the school should develop a clear curriculum alignment and planning process that ensures alignment with all Indiana state academic standards, particularly outside of the A+ program.

4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum is not implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is not focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery lacks the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities lack variety and/or limited use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) staff do not receive feedback on instructional practices.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum is not implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is not focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery lacks the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities lack variety and/or limited use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) staff do not receive feedback on instructional practices.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) the curriculum is implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery possesses the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities possess variety and/or use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) supplies sufficient feedback to staff on instructional practices.

Does Not Meet Standard. The FYCR site visit team examined this standard only in the context of the original charter and not in the context of the recently-developed college readiness mission. The team determined that the school did not meet the standard in two or more areas, finding that the curriculum was being implemented according to its design in most classrooms visited, but that there were significant issues with: (1) the focus on learning objectives outside of the A+ program; (2) pace and rigor of instruction; and (3) the ability of the program to engage a wide range of students.

The FYCR site visit team found the curriculum was being implemented according to its design in the majority of classrooms, but that there were concerns about the efficacy of the design and the effectiveness of the strategies being employed. In a typical classroom, teachers rotated students through three different activities—individual work on the computer using the A+ program, independent seat work from either supplemental texts or from worksheets, and direct instruction in small groups with the teacher. Instructional time away from A+ is intended to include project work, which would provide for more opportunities to develop higher-order skills. This three-pronged approach is intended to provide the individual student with multiple avenues to learn.

The principal indicated that he felt the curriculum as currently implemented was effective for only 60% of students. Teachers' estimates of the effectiveness of the program for students ranged from a high of 80% to a low of 60%. In almost half the classrooms visited by the FYCR site visit team, student engagement in the lesson was 60% or less. While teachers appeared to very effectively engage students during the direct instruction rotations, during independent student work on computers and independent student work at desks, the observers noted significant amounts of off-task behaviors.

The lessons in the curriculum presented by computer were focused on the core objectives embedded in the A+ program. Students progress through a sequence of lessons and, eventually, are assessed on the content covered. The objectives within the A+ system are made clear to the students through this process.

For the instruction observed that was outside of the A+ program, there was little evidence of the lesson's objectives or the alignment between the objectives of those lessons and the objectives of the A+ lessons. In most classes, observers did not see or hear clear objectives explained to students outside of the A+ computer-driven instruction. Without clearly stated or written learning objectives for students, the alignment of the on-line work with the project-based and small-group work was not clear.

The A+ curriculum delivered by computer is self-paced and, by design, its rigor is determined by the pace with which students move through the series of lessons. The degree of off-task behaviors observed by the FYCR site visit team calls into question the rigor and pace of the A+ curriculum as implemented. The pace and rigor of small-group and project-based instruction was generally not rigorous. Observers noted that students demonstrated off-task behavior for almost 65% of the time in many classes. In focus group discussions, teachers cited a lack of student motivation as a major challenge to increasing students' competencies.

Teachers were consistently observed to break down their classes into groups for A+, projects and independent work. Per the design, these activities should provide students with alternate paths to mastering Indiana state academic standards and should supplement A+ in key areas not addressed by the program. A+ lessons provide strong content and many opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge of facts and mastery of some skills. They do not, however, provide opportunities for students to demonstrate Indiana state academic standards in such areas as writing, listening and speaking within the English standards or communication and critical response skills within the science standards. As currently implemented, project-based and small-group work generally do not provide a clear alternative to addressing these standards. The majority of small-group work mimicked A+ in that students worked alone on worksheets that were not unlike A+ assignments. Alternative strategies (e.g., use of manipulatives, experimentation, discussion, demonstrations and modeling) were seldom observed.

The principal reported a need for professional development to support project-based and small-group instruction. Groups of teachers reported that getting to all students across the three groups was an issue. Teachers also mentioned the frustration of working with large numbers of students who were not motivated to complete assigned tasks – either on the computer or during independent practice – without constant supervision. Students working on independent work in some classes became obviously frustrated when the teacher, who was providing direct instruction to another group of students, was not immediately available to answer their questions.

The assessments built into the A+ program were deemed to be effective measures of student performance of the specific objectives of the lesson being presented. During the small-group and independent-work sessions, there was little evidence of effective assessment of student learning by the teachers. Although observers looked for specific instances of teachers asking probing and extended questions to check for deeper understanding, only a few teachers were seen using these techniques. The principal reported that this is an area that will be addressed in future professional development sessions.

There appeared to be adequate resources to support instruction in all observed classrooms. In almost every classroom visited, the FYCR site visit team noted that there were adequate resources available for the teacher and the students. During teacher interviews, no teacher mentioned a shortage of supplies or materials as an impediment to learning. Because of the rotation system used in every classroom, there was an adequate number of working computers to meet the needs of the students assigned to work independently on the computers. Also, during the three-day site visit, there were no apparent

breakdowns in the computer network that supports the running of the A+ system, indicating a high level of technical support.

In summary, while the FYCR site visit team found the curriculum being implemented according to its design, there were concerns about the design and the effectiveness of the model being employed. These concerns are echoed by staff and administration, who estimate that 40% or more of students are not being optimally challenged at this time. There was little evidence of the objectives of lessons presented by direct instruction or the alignment of the objectives of that instruction and the objectives of the A+ lessons. The degree of off-task behaviors observed by the FYCR site visit team and the expressed concerns of the faculty makes one question the rigor and pace of the A+ curriculum as implemented at the school. The effectiveness of the multiple strategies employed in classrooms when students were not directly involved with the teacher is a concern. A structured, data-driven assessment is needed, to assist in determining additional teaching strategies and competencies that may be required to meet the needs of all students. Once these teaching strategies and competencies have been identified, the school should provide targeted professional development and collaborative supervision to support the staff in its implementation of any new strategies that may result from the above assessment.

4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for post-secondary options?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) the school's academic program lacks challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) lack of high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) insufficient material resources and personnel guidance available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) limited opportunities for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) the school does not meet Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) the school's academic program lacks challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) lack of high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) insufficient material resources and personnel guidance available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) limited opportunities for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) the school does not meet Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.
Meets standard	The school: a) has challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) has high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) has sufficient material resources and personnel guidance available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) presents opportunities for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) meets or exceeds Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.

Not Evaluated. The principal is currently developing a plan to meet the standard in this area. Because that plan is in the developmental stages only, and the school served students only up to grade nine in 2005-06, the FYCR site visit team did not review the school in this area. The FYCR site visit team recommends that the Mayor's Office revisit the school next year to determine if programs in place at that time will enable the school to meet the standard.

4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are not accurate or useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are not received by classroom teachers in a timely or useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments lack sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is limited frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are not used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are not accurate or useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are not received by classroom teachers in a timely or useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments lack sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is limited frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are not used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.
Meets standard	The school: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are accurate and useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are received by classroom teachers in a timely and useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments have sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is sufficient frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.

Approaching Standard. The school uses a number of useful and accurate internal assessments, including those built into A+ and Waterford Reading and teacher-designed assessments. The FYCR site visit team did not observe classroom assessments that measured higher-order thinking. Standardized data include Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) and ISTEP+. NWEA is a useful and accurate measure but, given the school's testing policy, the school must ensure that its testing policy is written, transparent and consistently implemented. Assessment results – both classroom and standardized – are received in a timely and useful manner to inform classroom instructional decisions. There is adequate frequency of classroom and standardized assessments to help guide instruction and, when indicated, to modify instruction.

Classroom assessments that are embedded in the A+ curriculum provide classroom teachers, students and parents with timely and accurate information on each student's individual progress and are helpful to teachers in identifying gaps in student learning. Various reports are available from A+. Parents and teachers have frequent access to this information. However, the FYCR site visit team did not see evidence of rigorous classroom assessments to gauge students' speaking, listening and communication skills. These can be assessed through project-based learning, but the FYCR site visit team did not see evidence of this practice. The annual fall and spring NWEA assessments provide useful standardized information on a student's individual growth from fall to spring and from year to year, and allows the comparison of student growth with demographically similar students from around the nation.

The ISTEP+, as currently being administered, is a useful tool in evaluating an individual student's progress. The way in which the school administers ISTEP+, however, is different from the manner in which schools traditionally administer the test. That difference stems from the school's promotion policy, under which students are promoted (or retained) based on their ability to demonstrate sufficient mastery on the A+ curriculum. So, for example, one teacher of ninth grade age students reported that of the 30

students of ninth grade age in the classroom, only five were proficient enough on A+ to have been promoted to ninth grade and, therefore, to take the ISTEP+ at the ninth-grade level. The remaining 25 students had not yet been promoted and, as a result, took the ISTEP+ at the sixth, seventh or eighth grade levels. In short, these students took the ISTEP+ at a grade level that in most schools is given to younger students. Although this testing policy is aligned with the school's philosophy of self-paced instruction, and the school reports that the policy has been approved by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), the school was not able to produce a copy of the policy in writing to the site visit team. Moreover, the school applies a different policy, also reported by the school to be approved by the IDOE, in testing students who are new to the school. The school's administration reported that, unlike current students, new students entering the school are placed in grades according to age and the grade levels reported by families upon enrollment in the school, rather than performance on A+. As a result, these new students take the ISTEP+ based on their age instead of their A+ curriculum results. The school reports that, after a student takes the ISTEP+ for the first time, he or she never takes an ISTEP+ exam at a lower grade level regardless of the grade level at which the student is proficient based on the school's A+ curriculum. It is important that the school ensure its ISTEP+ testing policies are in writing, transparent, and consistently applied to every student. It is also important to recognize that, because of its unique testing and promotion policies, it could be difficult to compare 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek's ISTEP+ pass rates to other schools' ISTEP+ performance as a way to judge the relative success of the school's academic program.

The A+ program provides nearly instant feedback for the teacher. Most teachers observed and interviewed indicated that decisions on required remediation, student grouping and re-teaching a concept are based on a review of student results on the A+ practice and mastery tests, as well as from student questions and requests for assistance during class. Student performance on project-based learning assignments was also reported by some teachers to inform instruction. Teachers also report that some instructional decisions based upon student performance on standardized tests. As an example, overall student performance on sections of the ISTEP+ that required students to write a response to a question have resulted in a renewed emphasis on student writing across the school.

There are a variety of classroom assessments used to help guide instruction for a wide range of student ability levels. During interviews, teachers and school leaders mentioned a variety of assessment tools that are currently being used to assess student ability levels. These included: A+, Dibels, Waterford, NWEA, ISTEP+ and teacher-prepared classroom assessments. The principal also indicated that the TerraNova assessments, which had been used previously in the school, would again – beginning in 2006-07 – become part of the annual student assessment process. The FYCR site visit team did not see evidence of assessments that provide information about higher-level student learning. The planned implementation of a more structured and rigorous project-based learning strategy will provide the school the opportunity to engage students in higher-level thinking and assess their performance at a higher level.

There is adequate frequency of classroom and standardized assessments to help guide instruction. During classroom observations, the FYCR site visit team observed several excellent examples of teachers using assessment data to guide instruction. A mathematics teacher was observed assessing his students on the objective of the day as they began class. The students who mastered the objective during the pretest were assigned directly to the computers to work on the concept through the A+ curriculum and to take the practice and mastery tests on the objective. Those who did not show mastery of the concept remained with the teacher for direct instruction on the concept and were reassessed at the end of the direct instruction

session. The students who then mastered the concept were, similar to the first group, assigned to the computers as the students from the first group moved from their computer-based work to individual practice problems to reinforce the concept. Students who had still not mastered the concept remained with the teacher for a re-teaching session, followed by computer-based study, practice and testing. In most of the classrooms observed, teachers had grouped students into three groups based upon their A+ performance and the results of standardized tests.

Overall, the school has the components of a useful assessment system and the FYCR site visit team found evidence that teachers are using these assessments. However, the school must ensure that it implements assessments that provide information about higher-level student learning and gauge students' speaking, listening and communication skills. Finally, the school must ensure that its ISTEP+ administration policies are clearly communicated to parents and the public and that these policies are written and applied consistently for all students.

4.5. Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) hiring processes are not organized to support the success of new staff members; b) inefficient or insufficient deployment of faculty and staff limits instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are not certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) does not relate to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD is not determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is not explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) hiring processes are not organized to support the success of new staff members; b) inefficient or insufficient deployment of faculty and staff limits instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are not certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) does not relate to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD is not determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is not explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) hiring processes are organized and used to support the success of new staff members; b) the school deploys sufficient number of faculty and staff to maximize instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) is related to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD opportunities are determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.

Does Not Meet Standard. The hiring processes at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek have not been organized to optimally support the success of new staff members. The deployment of faculty and staff limits instructional effectiveness and does not provide adequate time for faculty collaboration and professional development. Professional development is determined in part by teacher choice and in part by administration's view of their needs. Levels of professional development are not adequate to meet current needs. The teacher evaluation plan, although explicit and clear, is not regularly implemented to support teacher development.

The principal reports that he is responsible for hiring the staff at the school. New teachers interviewed reported that the principal, based upon his frequent informal observations of their work, regularly provides informal feedback to them. The annual formal evaluation provided to all teachers and the

informal feedback provided from the principal were not viewed as sufficient to support the success of new staff members in this challenging environment.

Staff members are assigned responsibility for monitoring students before and after school, during lunch and recess and for remediation during periods when groups from their classes are involved in specials, thus providing little time for staff collaboration. Although, the CEO and principal reported that the instructional model is staffed as called for, many teachers commented on the need for additional adult support in some classrooms when students are rotating through the three instructional modes. The principal also pointed out that, in view of the increased student numbers and addition of upper grades, the school needs a dean of students.

Two teachers, in addition to full-time classroom responsibilities, currently share responsibility for special education. Some teachers and the GEO Foundation's Special Education Coordinator report a concern for a number of students who may have not been appropriately identified for special education services. It is not clear how the current deployment of staff can address this need.

Topics for professional development are selected based on both teacher choice and on administrative assessments of teachers' needs. There is a two-week orientation provided to all staff members. Most staff members feel this training is especially valuable to teachers new to the school or new to the profession, but for many returning teachers, much of the material covered is considered redundant. During the current school year, two days of professional development time were built into the school calendar. Teachers also have the opportunity to attend professional development opportunities outside the school. Several teachers indicated that, during the current school year, they had been able to attend very worthwhile programs that they had requested. Middle school teachers indicated that they spent a day in collaboration with their middle school peers at the other local 21st Century Charter School. The principal reported that the schedule for 2006-07 will provide greater opportunity for teachers to collaborate at the end of the school day and be engaged in meaningful professional development. Based on feedback from faculty members during one-on-one interviews, they are anxious for more targeted professional development based upon their needs and their students' needs, and for the opportunity to implement new strategies in a supportive environment with feedback from their colleagues and the administration. One area consistently mentioned was the need for more training in project-based learning.

The principal reported providing teachers, at the beginning of the year, the evaluation form that clearly states his expectations for teacher performance. Some teachers reported using this form as a self-evaluation instrument during the year. At the end of the year, each teacher receives a summative evaluation from the principal. Teachers reported that meetings with the principal after they received their annual evaluations were characterized by open two-way communication and were helpful to their professional development. In addition to the annual evaluation using the formal instrument, the principal reported making frequent informal observations and providing frequent informal feedback to teachers based on these observations. Teachers indicated that informal feedback from the principal was usually of a very general nature and sometimes resulted in a general comment to the faculty by the principal at a faculty meeting. The FYCR site visit team felt that a single formal evaluation once each year was not sufficient to meet the needs of many of the staff's less experienced members. The principal indicated that he planned to increase the frequency of formal observations and feedback in 2006-07, with the goal of observing every teacher two or three times during the year and providing feedback after each visit.

The evidence collected by the FYCR site visit team indicates that 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek has not met many of the standards in this area. In order to see improvements, the FYCR site visit team recommends the following: (1) determining, as planned, an optimal school schedule to support both classroom instruction and teacher planning and collaboration; (2) assessing the effectiveness of current staff deployment to meet all students' needs; and, (3) implementing, as planned, a more regular and systematic supervision process to improve instructional practice.

4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>both</u> of the following areas: a) significant disagreements exist among stakeholders about the school's mission; b) there is a lack of widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) significant disagreements exist among stakeholders about the school's mission; b) there is a lack of widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.
Meets standard	The school: a) has a mission that is shared by all stakeholders; b) has stakeholders possessing widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.

Meets Standard. Board members, the CEO, the principal, teachers, parents and students all could state in their own words the key elements of the school's mission. The principal and staff, through their efforts to meet the needs of all of their students, have demonstrated a strong commitment to the school's mission. The parents with whom the FYCR site visit team spoke in focus groups indicated that they chose this school for their children because of its emphasis on meeting the needs of each individual student – a key part of its mission statement. In keeping with the mission statement's "no excuses" tenet, neither the principal nor any member of the staff used that fact as an excuse for not making AYP this year.

The school describes its mission as follows

21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek will make "no excuses" for its student population and will dedicate itself to ensure that all students show growth in character, academics, life skills, the arts, and wellness, using teaching skills tailored to meet the needs of each student.

During the site visit, interviews were held with three members of the Board, the CEO and principal, every teacher in the building, a representative group of parents and a selected group of students from various grades. In response to the question, "What is the mission of this school," representatives of each of these groups used the terms "no excuses," "meeting individual needs" and "self-paced." It was clear to the FYCR site visit team that all stakeholders shared the school's vision.

Members of these same groups also were asked, "How well do you think the school is achieving this mission with the present population?" Responses to this second question were more varied, with answers ranging from a low of 60% to a high of 80% in terms of the percentage of the student body for whom the school program was working well. In light of the significant percentages of students whom teachers felt were not having their needs met by the current program, the best measure of their commitment to the school's mission were the declarations by teachers and administrators during interviews with the FYCR site visit team that they knew they needed to continue working even harder to make sure their program met all students' needs. Teachers spoke of the need for more professional development, different teaching strategies, better use of assessment data and more parent involvement. This indicated to the FYCR site visit team that the school is truly committed to achieving its mission.

There is widespread agreement among all stakeholders concerning the school's mission. There is also a very strong commitment among all stakeholders to do whatever it takes to accomplish that mission.

4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address them: a) The school does not have clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach does not possess high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are disrespectful and/or unsupportive and there are non-existing or unclear processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are unprofessional and/or unproductive.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address it: a) The school does not have clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach does not possess high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are disrespectful and/or unsupportive and there are non-existing or unclear processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are unprofessional and /or unproductive.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) the school has clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach possesses high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are respectful and supportive and faculty and students are clear about processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are professional and constructive.

Meets Standard. The school climate at 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek is conducive to the success of students and staff. Clearly stated and enforced rules are in place for student behavior, and interactions between staff and students, and staff and the administration, were found to be very respectful, supportive and constructive.

High expectations for student behavior at the school begin with its performance goals. These goals state that graduating students will demonstrate the ability to engage in responsible, compassionate peer relationships, the ability to collaborate and work with others in cooperative groups, and strong citizenship and leadership skills. These skills are taught in the school's character education program. Every student in the school attends character education class at least twice each week. The classes in character education stress core values (e.g., respect and responsibility) and feature common themes across grade levels, such as Black History Month in February, which was linked to the local Underground Railroad Museum. These skills are further developed in the individual classrooms and the school's common areas where observers noted prominent displays of classroom rules and positive reinforcements for appropriate behaviors.

Although there were no observed breaches of the school's discipline program during the site visit, the principal pointed out several students who were participating in community service projects in the school as their consequence for misbehavior. Of particular note was the fact that the school has a dress code. Throughout the visit, there were many observations across all grades of teachers asking students to "tuck in their shirts." The typical student response was to quickly follow the teacher's request. These observations support that there are high expectations, that teachers enforce them and that students generally comply. Parents questioned during focus group meetings felt that the school provided a "safe

and secure” environment for their children and that, although one had expressed some original concerns with mixing the students from grades K-10, she had become completely satisfied with the arrangement.

During more than 20 classroom visits, the FYCR site visit team noted the absence of disruptive behaviors and a climate of very respectful interactions between the staff and students. Although there were periods of off-task behaviors observed by some students during some classes, seldom were these behaviors disruptive to the learning of the other students in the room. Interactions between students and all staff members were very respectful and mostly positive.

Interactions between members of the administrative team and the staff were also observed to very supportive and respectful. During interviews with teachers, it was clear that they believed the principal was committed to helping them succeed and that, although there was not always a quick turnaround or complete follow-through on their requests, it was more the result of the tremendous challenges he faced in his position than a lack of support for the teachers. The principal likewise referred to the commitment and dedication of his staff and their strong belief in the school's mission as factors that he believed would lead to the school's eventual success.

The school's climate was quite conducive to creating a positive environment for learning. There was ample evidence of high expectations for student behavior and mutual respect between the staff and students. Although off-task behaviors did not often result in disruptions to the learning environment in the classrooms, they were indicative of a lack of motivation on the part of some students to succeed. More emphasis in character education classes and in the school in general must be placed on moving beyond a culture conducive to student learning to one that creates a greater urgency for student learning as the key to success through hard work.

4.8. Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) there is a lack of active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) school communication is neither timely nor relevant to the parental concerns; c) student academic progress and achievement reports are not clearly reported and/or misunderstood; d) the school's communication methods are not well-designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., not communicating in parents' native languages, communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at inconvenient times for parents).
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) there is a lack of active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) school communication is neither timely nor relevant to the parental concerns; c) student academic progress and achievement reports are not clearly reported and/or misunderstood; d) the school's communication methods are not well-designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., not communicating in parents' native languages, communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at inconvenient times for parents).
Meets standard	The school: a) has active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) utilizes communications that are both timely and relevant to the parental concerns; c) communicates student academic progress and achievement in reports that are understood by parents; d) the school's communication methods are designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., communicating in parents' native languages, not communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at convenient times for parents).

Meets Standard. Communications between 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek and the parents of the school's students are frequent and informative. The school's communications with parents are provided on a regular basis and appear to meet all parents' needs.

Teachers employ a variety of means to help keep parents informed. Parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with the quantity and quality of information the school provided about the school's programs and their child's progress. One parent characterized the school's communications as "very informative." She cited the weekly advisory progress reports, the regular character education progress reports and the overall feeling of being welcomed to ask questions about her child's progress and the school's programs, to be a real strength. Teachers talked about the frequent interactions with parents by face-to-face conversations and through email as very effective ways to maintain two-way communications. Several teachers also commented that they make every effort to accommodate parents' requests to meet with them because "they realize the importance of the parents' involvement in their children's education" and want to take advantage of every opportunity they have to support and reinforce that effort.

Parents are kept apprised of their children's academic progress on the school's A+ program and on standardized tests in a very timely manner. Through the use of student advisories in which each teacher is responsible for tracking and reporting on 15 students, the school provides feedback to parents on their children's weekly progress on the A+ curriculum. Through the weekly advisory reports, parents are informed of the number of lessons their child attempted in the A+ program, the amount of time spent on the various activities associated with a lesson (study, practice, practice tests and mastery tests) and the results of mastery tests the child has successfully completed during the period. This system provides parents an almost "real-time" report on their child's progress with the curriculum. Additionally, the results of standardized tests, such as the annual ISTEP+ and twice yearly Northwest Evaluation Association assessments, are also shared with the parents as soon as the school receives them.

Several faculty members questioned the efficacy of the school's communications. One teacher stated, "There is no question that we provide lots of good information to parents about how their children are doing, but we don't always know if that information is making a difference. We don't get as much feedback from parents as we would like." The parents who were part of the parent focus group indicated great satisfaction with the school's communications, but they represented only a small number of parents. The school should continue to emphasize having a large percentage of parents participate in the quarterly academic conferences and look for additional ways to increase parent involvement in meaningful ways.

The communications between the school and its students and their parents are a clear strength. There appears to be a sufficient quantity and quality of communications concerning individual students' progress and the school's programs. The school should continue to build on this strength and seek ways to determine their communications efforts' effectiveness.

APPENDIX A

FOURTH YEAR CHARTER REVIEW SITE VISIT TEAM

The Fourth Year Charter Review site visit to 21st Century Charter School at Fall Creek was conducted on March 28 -30, 2006 by a team of educators from SchoolWorks LLC and the University of Indianapolis.

Ledyard McFadden, Team Leader, President, SchoolWorks LLC

Dr. Ruth Green, Team Member, Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning, University of Indianapolis

Dr. Dennis McKnight, Team Member, Consultant, SchoolWorks LLC